

## **Civil Societies and Economic Citizenship: The Contribution of Basic Income Theory to New Interpretations of the Public Sphere**

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### Introduction: defining economic citizenship

The theoretical concept of citizenship has traditionally been concerned with notions of the universal and is focused upon a form of status which is accorded to individuals and which has an official, public meaning. Nonetheless the traditional model invoked by T.H. Marshall in the UK which encapsulated civil, political and social rights failed to provide a strong conceptualisation of economic citizenship. Where it incorporated industrial rights and the right to limited social protection, Marshallian theory did not anticipate the growing importance and pervasiveness of the economy as a mediator of modern existence. Thus traditional views of citizenship focused on political and social relations without grasping the ways in which they might be undermined by the economic. Indeed, for Marshall, rather than being harmful to citizenship, markets provided resources for redistribution through the welfare state. More recently theories of citizenship have had to grapple with economic issues because the growth of neo-liberalism, and the experiments carried out in the name of that philosophy in the UK and USA, have demonstrated how social and political rights can be undermined by the imperatives of market mechanisms. Theories of basic income have been central to the renewal of citizenship theory because they have reasserted the primacy of social rights against the neo-liberal backlash. However some basic income theories are more extensive than others in terms of guaranteeing economic rights. Those that are based upon rather minimal provision to absolve the state from extensive social provision (which often emanate from the Right) employ a very limited conception of economic citizenship where the rights accorded comprise little more than subsistence payments to individuals. More radical basic income theories such as that developed by Gorz (1999) are based upon the provision of a substantial basic income that would enable individuals to make real choices regarding the blend of activities they pursue. Where the former is likely to generate further labour market dependence to top up subsistence payments, the latter is intended to emancipate individuals from the ideology of work and the necessity of labour market participation.

This paper will argue that basic income theories play an important role in the rethinking of economic citizenship, not only in terms of freeing people from paid work, but also in providing substantive opportunities for individuals to be more socially and politically engaged. Thus economic citizenship should be envisaged not just in terms of a negative freedom from economic rationality provided by financial transfers, but also as a positive contributor to a process in which individuals are able to actively engage in a wide range of sectors of society. In many recent debates about strengthening communities or associations of which individuals are members, civil society has been promoted as the sphere of society in which increased participation can take place. This paper will examine recent theories of civil society and the ways in which they contribute to debates over economic citizenship and the reimagining of the political. The limitations of these theories will be contrasted with some of the ideas that have emerged from basic income theory and the contribution of the latter to new thinking on the public sphere will be evaluated.

### Civil society and markets: legitimising non-market work

The focus on civil society in contemporary political theory suggests that there is wide recognition of a democratic deficit in advanced capitalist societies. This necessitates the rethinking of political structures to complement the social conditions of an increasingly complex world. In the work of commentators such as Anthony Giddens (1999) we can trace the contours of the new civil society debate. He recognises the limitations of orthodox pluralist theory and the problems for civic culture which are generated by the hegemony of market discourses. Moreover Giddens also states the case for the interdependence of the state and civil society rather than traditional approaches which have emphasised their separation. According to the latter perspective, civil society has been regarded as the sphere which is beyond the realm of the state but which also contains social relations that don't take place within the private sphere of the individual. Thus, historically, civil society has been depicted as a site for the operation of markets that can be freed from regulation by the state. From this we can see how the debate over civil society has been marked by ambiguity over the public or private nature of civic relations and the impact of markets upon civic culture. In this sense a thorough rethinking of civil society must contain both a political and an economic dimension.

The approach employed here sets out from the supposition that civil society is not a given in any particular society but that the form which it takes depends upon the relationship with the state at any one time. Thus civil society can be strengthened or weakened through political initiatives. This stands in contrast to theorists such as Francis Fukuyama (1996) who regard civic structures as essentially culturally defined and are less prepared to countenance the political manufacture of civic culture. On the Left, especially under the influence of Gramsci, civil society has been flagged up as a key factor in the reproduction of capitalism. The latter is not achieved through the control of the state alone or the economic base, but rather it is also facilitated through a range of forms throughout society in which capitalist hegemony is maintained. Thus capitalist reproduction is cultural and social as well as economic. Power is wielded and maintained through an integrated set of institutions imbued with particular values and not merely by market mechanisms alone. Thus many on the Left have had to accept that markets cannot be eradicated or wished away and therefore, 'we are all going to have to live with some mix of market and state orchestration. The difficult question is what mix suits each society' (Taylor 1997: 68). It is in this context that we see why civil society has become such a deeply contested concept in the social sciences. Civil society is not a simplistic 'politics-free sphere' but rather it seems that the 'definition we accept of civil society will have important consequences for our picture of the free society and hence our political practice' (Taylor 1997: 77). Thus the nature of social pluralism and the possibilities for a multiplicity of communities and associations existing alongside one another depend as much upon political factors as historical developments or cultural predispositions towards a diverse and pluralised form of civil association.

The focus on civil society, evident in the work of commentators such as Fukuyama (1996, 1999) and Giddens (1998, 1999) in recent times, represents a reassertion of the primacy of the third sector, that is, the ill-defined sphere that lies between the state and the individual. For Fukuyama, the regeneration of civil society would provide the trust and social capital that would assist the successful working of the economy. Thus the social glue or cement of society would not be provided by the state nor could we rely upon isolated individuals to spontaneously formulate the kinds of relationships that assist firms to work most efficiently. From Fukuyama's perspective, we need bodies such as churches and charities, communities and local associations that ground people in civil society. According to this model then,

civil society is not merely an end in itself but rather it is viewed as a part of society which assists economic operations and indeed it is the sphere in which markets are able to operate free from regulation or state intervention. In this sense there is an obvious attraction of civil society to conservative and/or liberal theory and it has been used similarly by centre Left theorists such as Giddens (and politicians such as Tony Blair) who try to offer a radical new politics without providing fundamental challenges to the hegemony of globalised markets (Hughes and Little 1999).

At the same time the rethinking of civil society may point to ways in which important radical ideas such as solidarity and community might be manufactured and supported in modern societies in the face of global capitalism. As such civil society may be a useful idea in the assessment of the fragmentation and social disintegration that is associated with advanced capitalist societies and recognised by moderate as well as radical thinkers. In the hands of radical democratic commentators such as John Keane (1998) civil society is a forum for rectifying the limitations of the state and the failings of market-based economies. In this sense we need to redefine the role of markets in modern life and we must also address the relationship between state institutions and bodies in civil society on the basis that the latter have value in themselves beyond their contribution to the market-based economy. From this perspective Andre Gorz contends that 'there can't be socialism without democracy, and there can't be democracy without a much more substantial civil society comprising a set of self-organized public activities recognized and protected by the state. Socialism was born out of a conflict between civil society and the market' (Gorz 1994: 83). Thus Gorz, a more recent convert to the cause of basic income (Gorz 1999), argues that we must explore methods of empowering individuals through providing meaningful opportunities for individuals to participate in a range of associations some of which are likely to be non-economic. However, whilst an ideal-type civil society may be a sphere of equal opportunities and scope for self-improvement, the very complexity, diversity and pluralism that it encourages also contains sources of conflict and violence. In the words of Hall, 'civil society is thus a complex balance of consensus and conflict, the valuation of as much difference as is compatible with the bare minimum of consensus necessary for settled existence' (Hall 1995: 6).

The potential of civil society for the advancement of pluralism and equality has been highlighted in communitarian terms most notably by Michael Walzer (1992, 1983). He advocates a potential regeneration of civil society as the venue in which individuals can participate pluralistically in social life. He believes that this provides a framework for 'a project of projects' according to which citizens can regain lost powers and influence over politics and the economy through small-scale activities and decisions made in the domain of civil society. This would spawn 'a new recognition ... that the good life is in the details' (Walzer 1992: 107). Walzer's argument suggests that civil society can become the location in which market organisations and state organisations can compete and co-operate, free from the constraints that previously bound their interactions such as bureaucracy. In this scenario the state could develop a framework for a value-free civil society which would be an arena in which a variety of bodies and institutions (including those of the state and market-oriented firms) could operate freely.

Two key criticisms can be made with regard to Walzer's perspective on the radical rethinking of community and civil society. Firstly his supposition of a value-free civil society is neglectful of the particular principles and values which are imbued within state institutions and market mechanisms. To suggest that civil society would be a neutral venue in which profit-making bodies or state regulation would seamlessly interact appears to overlook the actual rationality that impels the forces of the state or

markets (Gorz 1989; Little 1998). Walzer's position neglects power differentials between consumers and presupposes the absence of vested economic interests. Rather a more persuasive argument is developed by Keane (1996; 1998) in his recognition that the promotion of civil society must not overlook the propensity of conflict leading to uncivil tendencies manifesting themselves in violence. Thus civil society must not be idealised as the location of unadulterated interaction between equally endowed groups who come together with benign, altruistic intentions. Whilst this may well be a desirable scenario, it overlooks not only uncivil tendencies created by individuals and groups, but also the ways in which incivility and violence can be generated by state institutions and the unfettered operation of market mechanisms. In this sense a radical democratic perspective must recognise that the advocacy of civil society as a strengthened sphere implies plurality and difference which may be integrative in some cases but also holds the potential for the expression of conflict (Keane 1998).

The second critical point relates to Walzer's failure to recognise that the primary role of the state with regard to civil society must be to manufacture a space in which the state would not have primary jurisdiction. Moreover the state must simultaneously ensure that the particular logic of market mechanisms - the logic of profit, growth and accumulation - would not dominate other principles such as friendship, voluntarism and co-operation which are related to civil association. This criticism does not merely apply to Walzer's conception of the macro-political level. In *Spheres of Justice* (1983) he conflates the pursuit of recognition in the eyes of others with economic activity in a form that suggests that individuals' source of recognition lies in competitive relations with regard to others. Of course, this assumption is manifest in much economic activity (especially in the domain of work-for-wages) but pays insufficient attention to the recognition and status that can (and should) be derived from non-economic activities. Thus John O'Neill argues that Walzer wrongly conflates recognition with appearances related to economic value, that is, those that we acquire as economic competitors. These appearances, in themselves, do not necessarily embody any notion of virtue: 'Appearance is something that is vied over by competitors in a market. The idea of independent worth disappears' (O'Neill 1998: 108). This implies that independent worth becomes subsumed by work-based definitions of identity and value in contemporary Western societies. Basic income theory, on the other hand, suggests that some of the most important virtues that individuals acquire and demonstrate are perhaps more likely to be manifest in non-economic sectors of social life.

Despite these criticisms, Walzer's argument remains useful for theorists concerned with a radical rethinking of pluralism insofar as it recognises the importance of the state in fostering the conditions under which the expansion of civil society can take place. Moreover he also identifies the need for associations with political agency if a more democratic civil society is to emerge. In this sense civil society remains a domain of political contestation between groups with differing objectives in mind. This is not to say, however, that civil society should be reinvigorated to provide a new sphere of interaction between the state and the market as Walzer implies. Rather civil society should be designed to encompass a kind of pluralist micro-politics which, although likely to influence major social and economic decision-making, is not dominated by state regulation or economic values. This suggests 'a process of rebuilding associations from below, by political campaigning and voluntary action in civil society' (Hirst 1995: 111; see also Young's (1995: 209) comments on the nature of civic associations). Walzer, on the other hand, implies a kind of associationalism whereby economic actors operate in civil society alongside communities that do not have economic objectives as their primary aim. This seems to underestimate the hegemony of the logic of market mechanisms and the impact that this has

elsewhere in society. Walzer fails to grasp the ways in which economic rationality spreads its pervasive influence into other spheres of life and comes to dominate in areas where its specific logic is not necessarily the most appropriate rationality (see Little 2000).

A more radical pluralist viewpoint than Walzer's would require a sphere for community action that was actually protected from economic values. The reason for this is straightforward; where communities, as defined upon the principles such as compassion, friendship, co-operation and mutual obligations, operate on the basis of non-economic objectives, bodies or associations acting for economic ends cannot have the principles of community at heart. If they did, it would be a recipe for economic problems as, more often than not, the pursuit of profit and growth must lay aside virtues such as voluntarism and friendship. The implications of this position should be clear. The prioritisation of community necessitates a sphere free from the direct control of the state and the pernicious influence of market mechanisms - this is what O'Neill refers to as a non-market order, although he does not explicitly identify how this order might be constituted (O'Neill 1998). This is not to say that we should try to eradicate market mechanisms. On the contrary, there must be a highly important area of interaction between the state and the market, but a separate civic sphere for communities must be created in which civic virtues would prevail. Although Keane (1998: 16-19) is sceptical of attempts, such as that of Habermas, to draw concrete lines between political and economic systems on one hand, and a sphere of freedom in civil society on the other, he does recognise that 'market forces tend to spread into every nook and cranny of social life, thereby violating its plurality of voices and identities ...' (Keane 1998: 19; see also Hirst 1994). This generates a potential impasse whereby the pervasiveness of market values cannot be reversed and their continued dominance over civic virtues remains in place. However Keane (1998: 169-178) does identify different levels of public sphere in which different groups of people are the key actors. Using this structure it is possible to argue that non-economic values could be located within a micro-political sphere free from state regulation and economic values. Elsewhere associations with economic interests as their primary concern would be able to be influential actors with regard to market transactions and the various levels of governmental regulation that exist in the economic sphere. In this sense we need to recognise that 'individuals no longer inhabit a single "public sphere", nor is their citizenship conferred upon them through a singular relationship with the state' (Rose 1999: 178).

The analysis of civil society theories such as those of Walzer and Keane offers a timely corrective to the dominance of economic thinking in modern politics. Where neither of them subscribe to the view that it is essential to manufacture an identifiably non-economic sphere, they do imply that it is important to resurrect opportunities for increased micro-political influence. However both fail to explain how a sphere of micro-politics might be protected from the economic rationality of markets. The danger remains then that the political may be subsumed within the economic. A more radical cry for the rejuvenation of associational politics is provided by O'Neill (1998) who recognises that the prominence in political debates of arguments around state regulation versus free markets is an indicator of the economism of orthodox political discourses. This reflects the neglect of the micro-politics surrounding issues of social cohesion and integration in the wider context of the dominance of political economy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the explicit attempts of the New Labour government in the UK to tackle the acknowledged problem of social exclusion through a waged-work-based strategy which ignores the sources of integration and social co-operation which exist beyond the formal economic sphere. Indeed we might argue that work-based theories of social integration pander to



economic liberal perceptions of individual worth. Whilst, the opportunity to work is a central feature of debates surrounding the future of citizenship especially with regard to economic rights (Little 1998), the focus on this type of activity to the exclusion of others (primarily unpaid) serves to cloud judgement on the nature of social solidarity. Rather than relying wholly on economic and work-based interpretations of the ingredients that bring social integration, radical approaches to the conceptualisation of civil society should recognise that the bonds which hold society together - the relations of solidarity which exist to a greater or lesser extent in any given society - are as much derived from non-economic activities (if not more so) than the traditional concerns of political economy. Moreover, in the light of the argument above, the radical reinterpretation of these relations of solidarity should recognise that the bonds within society as a whole, as with civil society as a category, do not emerge fully formed as a by-product of our economic arrangements. Rather they must be 'manufactured' and policy initiatives in both the economic and social domains will impact upon the nature of the social relations that exist. As such the process of radically rethinking civil society must recognise the importance of creating a solidaristic environment and the ways in which the promotion of a politics of difference impacts upon the nature of the relationships on which social cohesion is generated and maintained.

### Civil society and the new economy

Ulrich Beck (1997) argues that new forms of technology and the post-industrial society coming into being mean that we are entering an era in which many of the old certainties of the modern world will be swept away to be replaced with a culture of doubt. This will become increasingly evident as traditional orthodoxies will be undermined and, as such, there will be a greater emphasis upon the multiplicity of ways of understanding the world in which we live. From Beck's perspective, the unifying universalistic logic of the state becomes less relevant to contemporary life and this provides new scope for the more particularistic environment of civil society as the site of the expression of difference. This is a reflection of the complexity of contemporary politics whereby older notions of universalism (often embodied in notions of citizenship) will be replaced by a realisation that the concretisation of the universal lies in an understanding of the particular. Moreover this complexity undermines traditional sources of authority and proffers opportunities for a reflexive engagement with contemporary political debates. The notion of civil society is relevant here if it can be constructed as a public space in which a multiplicity of political ideas and perspectives can interact.

Beck has expanded upon these ideas in *Democracies without Enemies* (1998). In a similar vein to Gorz (1999), Beck argues that the system of work that characterised capitalist modernity is breaking down and as a consequence the value system of society which has traditionally relied on orthodox theories of work and access to economic security is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Beck believes that the risk of unemployment is now ubiquitous and universal and that this 'post-work society' requires a new democratic order. He suggests that the creation of this new order is hindered by three myths surrounding the future of employment: firstly, that the economy is beyond our understanding; secondly, that the service sector will provide sufficient work to offset growing unemployment; and, thirdly, that all we have to do to combat these trends is drive down the costs of labour. These wrong-headed assumptions, according to Beck, ignore the growing problems of contemporary Western capitalism, not least the threat to democracy that emanates from new patterns of unemployment and under-employment. He argues that Western capitalism has always linked political freedoms to material

security and that citizenship and democratic participation have been predicated upon notions of full employment. Whilst politicians continue to employ the rhetoric of the latter, a new reality is beginning to emerge which undermines democracy. Capitalism is increasingly jobless - growth no longer brings more employment - and little public finance exists to rectify this situation. Thus, in the words of Gorz:

It has to be recognized that neither the right to an income, nor full citizenship, nor everyone's sense of identity and self-fulfilment can any longer be centred on and depend upon occupying a job. And society has to be changed to take account of this ... The place of work in everyone's imagination and self-image and in his/her vision of a possible future is the central issue in a profoundly political conflict, a struggle for power. (Gorz 1999: 54)

In this context Beck calls for greater recognition of 'public work' which he sees as 'an odd blend of politics, care for others and everyday cooperation' (Beck 1998: 60). He believes that this can feed into new forms of active democracy in which decentralisation and citizen participation are the key guiding processes. Put simply, Beck sees this as a recipe for the rejuvenation of civil society in which we should invest and delegate authority. The empowerment of civil society would involve measures to try and give status to unpaid work and activities within the private and public spheres that were carried out without remuneration as a primary purpose. For Beck, this would provide the material and cultural foundations for 'individualism coupled with solidarity' (Beck 1998: 60). Like many contemporary radical commentators, Beck expresses some support for some form of guaranteed minimum income payment for citizens as a means of supporting this investment in social capital. In a similar vein Andre Gorz has also retracted some of his older objections to basic income in the context of the opportunities that have now been opened up by the post-Fordist changes in our industrial and economic arrangements.

In this context it is important to return to the perspective on civil society which can be found in John Keane's *Civil Society* (1998). In this work Keane demonstrates how complex civil society is and he reiterates that we should be wary of theories which suggest that civil society can be separated off from the economy or a broader political society. Thus he argues that it is problematic to view civil society as a sphere of freedom whereas the economy or the state comprises the realm of necessity. Similarly Keane rejects the Habermasian dichotomy between the system and the lifeworld and contends that, in an era of individualism and pluralism, conflict and confusion between the two is likely to occur. Thus civil society is regarded as a venue in which conflict takes place and is resolved or contained - it is in this sense deeply political. According to Keane's theory then, civil society is 'a signifier of plurality' (Keane 1998: 53) and this means that we need to avoid justifying civil society on the basis of substantive grounding principles or foundations such as justice, rights or utility. At the same time it is the venue in which these kinds of values should be debated and evaluated; Keane is therefore not seduced by the apolitical 'abyss' of relativism. Instead, against relativist commentators such as Rorty, he proffers a need for new forms of political thinking through which institutions can be created that facilitate democracy. This democracy must recognise plurality and difference: 'democracy has to live with those who are unfriendly to democracy. It has to tolerate the intolerant. It has to take pity on those who know no pity' (Keane 1998: 61).

Keane rejects the Marxian perspective that theorising civil society is a bourgeois enterprise and critically argues against Marxist ideas regarding the inherently problematic nature of the state and civil

society. Where for orthodox Marxists both the capitalist state and bourgeois civil society must be overcome, for Keane, both must be strengthened and democratised. Whilst he associates problems of violence and incivility with the operation of the state, he realises the necessity of state mechanisms in facilitating political structures that could empower a democratised civil society. At the same time he does not want to glorify an idealised civil society as can be witnessed in some liberal theories such as that of Gellner. Rather he sees the civic bond between individuals as one of the forms of association which play a part in any healthy democracy and the latter implies a plurality of perspectives followed by free citizens:

democracy ... requires various governmental and non-governmental social policies (in fields such as health, education, child care and basic income provision) which prevent the market exchanges of civil society from becoming dominant and thereby ensure that citizens can live as free equals by enjoying their basic political and civil entitlements. (Keane 1998: 88)

This necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between the state, the economy and civil society. There has been a long tradition of theory that attempts to differentiate and protect civil society from both the state and the economy but Keane makes the case for a more integrated approach. Thus he suggests that rather than a singular entity, we need to envisage three different types of public sphere: the micro-public, meso-public and macro-public spheres. The first refers to small group or associational relations on a sub-state level, the second entails larger groups interacting on the nation-state level, and the third refers to political disputation on the global, supranational level. Issues will filter across these levels and individuals may participate in different ways in these overlapping domains. For Keane we must legitimise each of these spheres to vindicate a diversity of forms of public/civic activity. Thus we must enable people to democratically participate within a range of associations - from small local communities to international social movements. This diversified view of civil society is another reflection of the complex nature of associations beyond the state and the variety of ways that humans interact with one another.

The idea that non-economic activities should be encouraged and legitimised is implicit in Keane's argument. However he does not provide a counterbalance to the pervasive influence that market mechanisms have on civic life, nor does he provide a solution to the deleterious affect markets can have on the possibilities of legitimising the non-market order. In this sense his theory of civil society can be criticised for failing to give significant weight to the dominance of the economic dimension and the obstacles that it provides to the expansion of civil society. His theory of different levels of public sphere is useful in demonstrating the wide range of associations that we have on different levels. Nevertheless, whilst he implies that non-economic activities should be valued, he does not suggest that we need to protect economic rights through guaranteeing a sphere of life in which market mechanisms will not predominate. Thus his treatment of the interaction of the economy and the public sphere is problematic. His theory of multiple public spheres is primarily focused on the political dimension and yet the different types of structures that he identifies therein could apply to the economic as well. Thus, if there were differing levels of public sphere which comprised the relationship between civil society, individuals and the state, then could these different public spheres not be comprised of a variety of activities some of which were economic and some of which were not? Thus we could have spheres of life in which market mechanisms predominate or where paid work is the primary form of activity, and, at the same time, others which are protected from the particular logic and rationality which emanates



from modern economic concerns. Like many commentators analysed here, Keane hints at support for a basic income (although in little detail), and yet he fails to understand the opportunities that basic income could open up for limiting economic rationality and vindicating life activities which do not have instrumental gain as their prime objective.

### Civil society, government and the market

Two different perspectives on the relationship between civil society and markets and the state are beginning to emerge which transcend divisions between the orthodox and the radical. The first view, which is evident in the work of Fukuyama, Giddens, Walzer and Keane, does not attempt to protect civil society from the influence of market rationality (although some of them recognise the detrimental impact that markets may have on civic virtues). The second view, evident in the work of radicals such as Gorz and O'Neill and more mainstream commentators such as Barber (1996; 1998), is that civil society should be constructed as an arena in which market logic should not prevail. The most persuasive case lies somewhere between the two positions and is predicated upon the existence of different levels and types of civil society.

Barber (1998) identifies three main approaches to civil society that he characterises as the libertarian, communitarian and strong democratic perspectives. The libertarian viewpoint is criticised because it relies upon a view of civil society as a synonym for the private sector in which the market prevails as the mediator of differing private individual freedoms. It rejects the interference of government in issues that are not a matter of public concern. The communitarian viewpoint is criticised by Barber for the opposite reason. Rather than civil society being a surrogate for the private sector and a negative view of individual liberty, communitarians 'think of civil society as a zone where people interact and are embedded in communities, and they treat it as the condition for all social bonding' (Barber 1998: 23). Barber is quick to point out that there is a paradox of communitarianism insofar as it is made possible by pluralistic values whilst simultaneously containing potentially exclusionary features. Thus 'democratic community is certainly no oxymoron, but community has ideal attributes that resist democracy, while democracy makes demands that can undermine community' (Barber 1998: 25). Barber is correct to identify the problems that develop when civil society is represented as the public domain of a unified community. As such he rightly notes that, whilst community is not inherently exclusionary, in practice it has often been manifest in authoritarian or hierarchical forms (Hughes and Little 1999). In this sense the libertarian and communitarian perspectives on civil society are problematic for Barber because they are constructed around a public-private divide which reflects an outmoded agenda on government and markets. Thus 'neither the libertarian nor the communitarian model serves as effectively as it might to make the revitalizing of civil society a condition for taming markets, civilizing society, and democratizing government' (Barber 1998: 16).

What, then, of Barber's third approach? He depicts this as the strong democratic perspective. It is founded upon the idea of civil society as the space between government and markets. This stance represents an attempt to grapple with the plurality of identities that individuals have and the differing purposes to which they apply their skills and talents. As such Barber does not want to deny the benefits which may accrue from market interactions or strong inclusive communities, but rather he wishes to recognise the multiplicity of associations to which individuals belong. Thus he foresees not only a

strong public sector in which regulation by government institutions is prominent and a private sector in which market exchange may be the dominant form of interaction, but also:

a third domain mediating between them, sharing the virtues of each. This third, independent sector is defined by its civic communities - their plurality is its essence - which are membership associations that are open and egalitarian enough to permit voluntary participation. (Barber 1998: 34-35)

Barber is aware that a perfectionist account of relations in civil society is unlikely to survive the scrutiny of comparison with the real world and thus, whilst he does want to promote openness and voluntary participation, he recognises that this may not always be the case. Most important is the way in which civil society could combine some of the virtues of the public and private sectors. In Barber's eyes civil society must try to engender the openness of the public realm with the voluntarism and lack of coercion that he regards as characteristic of the private sector. It is this interaction which he regards as the key process in achieving democracy, that is, a society marked by pluralism and a degree of equality. The latter vision of civil society is certainly one that moves beyond orthodox communitarianism and provides an environment in which radical theories of community could flourish. The existence of a multiplicity of communities (some of which may not be as open or voluntaristic as a perfectionist account would suggest as the ideal) provides a basis for people to engage in a degree of choice over which associations they belong to in civil society. For this reason 'pluralism is the condition of liberty in a strong democratic civil society. More is better' (Barber 1998: 36).

Barber's model of civil society can be criticised for exaggerating the harmonious nature of the relationships that might ensue from a strong democratic civil society. He offers us little by way of a challenge to the expansionist horizons of economic rationality whereby the values of 'the market' are spread widely throughout society and come to dominate spheres of life where those values are wholly inappropriate. Perhaps he underestimates the proselytising zeal of the ideology of work and its proponents in the fields of economics and politics. This is not say that he is not aware of the problems of modern political economy. Indeed, under the influence of Rifkin's 'end of work' thesis (1995), Barber points out the paradoxes in contemporary discourses on work and welfare and notes the economic policies of Lionel Jospin's socialist government in France as an attempt to grapple with some of these contradictions. However he appears to offer more of a diagnosis of the problems of civil society than a remedy for the social and economic problems which impair it (Barber 1998: ch.5). This is not to reject his model wholesale but merely to suggest that sterner governmental action than he implies may be necessary to create a space in which market values do not prevail. Thus his advocacy of civil society as a space between government and market does not grasp the ways in which public spaces must be protected against the power and vested interests of the private and public sectors. If we are to legitimise non-market work and provide individuals with economic independence from market participation, then a more forthright government programme of reform will be required (Gorz 1999). Barber's statement that 'civil society is ... public without being coercive, voluntary without being privatized' (Barber 1996: 271) does not explain how exactly those values are to be cultivated without them becoming coercive or privatistic. Without necessarily being an ideal solution, a basic income might provide a buttress against the expansionism of the state and markets into a potential civic sphere by empowering people to make lifestyle choices which are not governed by alternative rationalities. In

this context Barber says relatively little about the social and economic policies required to facilitate the political renewal he advocates.

Barber's focus is on the political nature of a democratised civil society. Thus he argues that we need a 'civic forum' in which the participating voice of civil society can be heard. For Barber, such an articulation of the public voice would help to rein in government and markets but this neglects the fact that 'the voice' of civil society is unlikely to be unitary or consensual. Indeed it is the condition of diversity that would allow civil society to be strengthened but this negates the possibility of a singular public voice emerging. In this sense we need to recognise the role of civil society in the process of democratic governance but also the need for the state to arbitrate where incommensurate voices are unable to reach agreement. This process of strengthening civil society relies upon government and politics. The political will is required to formalise the process - that it will just occur is wishful thinking that underestimates the power of vested interests. In setting out civil society as a space between government and markets, we must be careful not to ignore the need for a democratic political process and the need to convince people that a civic forum of the kind Barber envisages would be desirable. In short, Barber focuses mainly on the political forms that would enable civil society to flourish. Democratisation and diversified governance are regarded as political exercises. There is insufficient recognition that a meaningful conception of civic association, and of civil society as the space in which micro-political groups find their voice, must be framed within economic and social policies as well as the formalities of political processes. To do so we must recognise and then legislate against the obstacles to civic participation upon which big government and markets have established their hegemony.

#### Conclusion: rethinking the politics and economics of civil society

It should be clear that there are numerous perspectives on civil society and, most importantly, on the relationship between civil society, government and markets. In the hands of communitarian orthodoxy civil society is a sphere in which a civic voice can be expressed because there is only one community with a shared moral concern. Most contemporary analysts of civil society look beyond this narrow vision of community and recognise that there will be a plurality of voices and different moral concerns if a healthy civil society is to emerge. Insofar as it contributes to a democratic politics, then, civil society theory can engender solidarities predicated on diversity because it is 'forged out of alliances between people who are different' and regards community as 'constructed in an explicitly political realm. It is "constructed" that is the key word here, implying a process based on different constitutive elements that may continue to be in tension' (Phillips 1999: 108). In the hands of commentators such as Barber, these differences do not prevent the articulation of a civic voice. However, it has been suggested here, in line with notions of agonistic pluralism (Mouffe 2000), that civil society would be a sphere of disagreement as much as one of a cohesive public voice. Indeed the strength of civil society according to the latter perspective is that conflicting perspectives can be expressed through our chosen associations but that these conflicts need not result in antagonism between enemies (Rose 1999: 195). This is the first major dividing line on civil society. On one hand some commentators regard it as a sphere in which a form of unity emerges out of difference and, on the other, some see the actual expression of difference as the source of solidarity and do not require civil society to generate a universal public voice.

The second major dividing line in civil society theory relates to the relationship between civil society and markets. Where civil society theorists tend to argue that a strong civil society would be independent of state governance (although there is difference on how this might manifest itself), there is considerable disagreement on the link between economic interactions and civil society. There is a multiplicity of fault lines on this issue. Economic thinkers such as Francis Fukuyama see a symbiotic relationship between civil society and the economy whereby they reinforce one another and generate social virtues that underpin economic success. This view is blind to the social disintegration and disruption that is caused by markets especially as they expand into ever more areas of social life. Others such as Anthony Giddens and John Keane advocate civil society without challenging the operation of market interactions therein. They are merely one set of relations (albeit not necessarily the most civic ones) within a range of interactions. This view is grounded in reality but is problematic insofar as it does not engage with the damage that pervasive market interactions have on social life. They do not merely coexist alongside other relations but tend to spread their tentacles as widely as possible in order to widen and reproduce spheres of profit and growth. This has been partially addressed by Benjamin Barber who argues for a civil society constructed around the openness of the public sphere and the voluntarism of civil society. However Barber does not really address economic and social policies in sufficient depth and focuses instead on the politics of civil society. Again this runs the dangers of underestimating the ways in which markets can pose just as much a threat to the health of civil society as overweening government and heavy-handed regulation through state bureaucracy.

Between these differing views on civil society we can outline a perspective on civil society which offers genuine possibilities for the realisation of civic virtues in the context of diversity and solidarity. In his recent work Keane (1998) has provided a theory of different levels of public sphere to recognise a variety of different types of association. Whilst he does not extend this argument to the role of the economic, it is possible, following Gorz (1989, 1999), to argue for a differentiated public domain in which markets have their place but where there are also spaces constructed for non-economic, non-instrumental associations or communities to operate. The means of achieving such a goal need not entail the construction of overt barriers between different public spheres but, by using social policies to guarantee incomes for security, by using economic policies to redistribute work and assist social inclusion, and by using political reforms to construct more participatory forms of governance, we see possibilities for radical reform. Such a process is difficult and a perfect model will not emerge but this appears to offer the most constructive imagining of civil society and the public sphere. Unlike orthodox communitarianism it does not attempt to impose moral unity and certainty, but instead it thrives on diversity and forms of solidarity which are not predicated upon a unitary moral culture. In short, such an understanding of civil society provides the most appropriate model for contemporary societies that are characterised by complexity.

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